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Hunt, Theodore Whitfield
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Babington Macaulay

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THE PROSE STYLE OF THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY

BY

THEODORE ^{W. H.} HUNT.

(In Representative English Prose and Prose Writers)

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The Prose style of Thomas Babington Macaulay

Brief Biographical Sketch

Born at Rothley Temple, Oct. 25th, 1800. In Cambridge, 1818; B.A. 1822. A Fellow of Trinity, M.A., 1825. Called to the Bar (Lincoln's Inn) 1826. Entered Parliament, 1830 for Calne. Entered Parliament, 1832 for Leeds. Became Secretary of Board of Control for India. In India 1835-8. In Parliament from Edinburgh, 1839. Secretary of War, 1840. Retired from Parliament, 1847. Lord Rector of Glasgow, 1849. Re-elected to Parliament 1852. Raised to Peerage 1857. Died, Dec. 18th, 1859 in Kensington.

Prose Works

As far as the prose works of Macaulay are concerned, with reference to the study of style, they are included in - The History of England, and his - Essays.

Although he had proposed to write this history "from the Accession of James the Second, down to a time within the memory of men still living" - as far indeed, as to the death of George IV., it covers, in fact, but a small portion of the nation's life, closing with the death of William of Orange.

His essays have been judiciously classified by Morison as follows:

1. English History - Burleigh, Hallam, Hampden, Milton, Temple, Mackintosh, Walpole, Pitt, Chatham, Clive and Hastings.
2. Foreign History - Macchiavelli, Mirabeau, Van Ranke, Frederic and Baiere.
3. Controversial - Mill, Saddler, Southey, and Gladstone.
4. Critical and Miscellaneous - Dryden, Montgomery, Byron, Bunyan, Johnson, Bacon, Hunt and Addison.

These several series include respectively, twelve, five, four and eight papers, making in round numbers, thirty productions of this periodical order.

It is not necessary here to follow the example of many

critics and aim to prove the superiority of these specimens of prose to the History of England. For the purposes of the student of English, it is better to regard them as complements of each other, the one supplying what the other lacks. In what is called the historical essay and in which Macaulay so succeeded, there is found the best possible example of the union of these two forms of prose-narrative and miscellany.

Popular Estimate of His Prose Style

Popularity, in the looser sense of the term, is not to be regarded as a true criterion either of character or ability. In the higher sense, however, it may be so accepted and enters as an important factor among others in making up the status of an author or a book.

Lord Macaulay must be classed among the popular writers of English prose in the first half of the present century. From the date of his formal entrance upon authorship, in his Essay on Milton, published in the Edinburgh Review, in 1825, on to the date of his death, in 1859, his prose may be said to have been inferior to that of no one of his contemporaries in the hold which it had upon the respect and admiration of the English people. Since his death and the commitment of his writings to posterity and to criticism, his prose still has a substantial place in English Letters. The one who denies his claim to be ranked among the first examples of English style, must see to it that he be prepared to maintain his difficult position. It is probably true, that even at this day, no history of England, covering the era which Macaulay treats, is oftener read or read with more intelligent interest than is his. It is, also, probable that the modern English student is as familiar with Macaulay's Essays as with those of any other prominent essayist of the century. Much of his essay prose, it is true, is superseded, as to its subject matter, by the course of events. Much of it was called forth by local and even partisan issues and served its purpose when it was penned.

Most of his readers care but little now as to what he said concerning Walpole, Clive and Hastings, or as to Machiavelli and Mirabeau. Some have gone so far as to say, that the partisan character of his essays, as a class, makes them unreliable for purposes of reference. The same criticism will apply to the historical prose, even of these prose productions, however, it may be stated, that the literary form in which they are cast and preserved is such as to make their present perusal an aesthetic pleasure to the intelligent critic of style. Such essays as these on - Temple, Hallam, Hampden, and the Pitts, local as was their origin, will maintain their interest as long as English Literature had a history. Even such faulty papers as those on Bacon, Addison and Milton still attract and charm us.

Such a general and sustained literary reputation as this in prose indicates the presence of qualities of excellence. Popularity, in this case, means some degree of merit. No fortuitous combination of circumstances can do for a man what Macaulay did for himself in this particular. The orator and the poet may owe more to native talent than to patient industry. It is not so with the prose writer. A careful study of his style will reveal his excellences and errors.

Analysis of his Style

(1) Skill in narrative and descriptive writing.

This skill is observable in each of these species of prose as, separately, also, in their combination, as Narrative-Descriptive. In that prose which is specifically historical as, in - History of England- it is natural to find this peculiar type of literary expression. History, as a record of events, must be largely narrative and as involving the portraiture of persons and scenes must be largely descriptive. This feature of style, however, is not confined // to the history proper or even to those of his essays which may be called historical, but finds expression in all the prose he has written.

It is the Narrative-Descriptive style in its best form and when it is seen what are the essential elements of prose discourse included in such a style, the mastery of Macaulay's pen in this special province will be evident.

(a) Clearness of presentation.

This is the first mark of good writing and is an integral part of that order of style now in question. Whatever may or may not be said of Macaulay's prose, it cannot be justly accused of obscurity. The student is not required, as in the case of Carlyle and Emerson, to read and read again in order to be sure of the meaning. The language is its own best interpreter and is always chosen with scrupulous care to express in the plainest terms the idea intended. Macaulay had, as every notable writer has had, some unsparing critics. There was everything in the attitude of the Edinburgh Review; in the political history of the time and of his brilliant career as a writer which incited his opponents to the sharpest censorship. The weak points of his style would of course be mercilessly exposed. It is noticeable, however, that very little is said as to ambiguity of style. The fact is that much of the criticism to which he was subjected was itself the best commentary on his literary clearness. His meaning was too well understood. There was no question as to the mark at which he was aiming, what he was saying and why he was saying it. In such an Essay as that on Warren Hastings or Horace Walpole, the reader has an example as to how Macaulay could make himself understood. The thought is clearly conceived and clearly phrased. If we look more

narrowly into this feature of Macaulay's Prose, it will be found to bear examination. It is evident from his biography that he made clearness a prime object in writing; that he severely revised his own style with reference to it and that he studied authors and men in the light of it. It is certainly a matter greatly to his credit as stated by his most recent biographer - that the working men of England sent him their thanks for writing a history that they could understand.

It is of special interest here to note that the prose of Macaulay in respect to its clearness was in every sense true to the claims of the home language. There are but few representative writers of English whose style so happily avoids the extreme of pedantry on the one hand, and that of purism on the other. His prose is true to that high and safe rhetorical principle in action, that the best word under the circumstances is to be used, whatever its origin may be. It is in carrying out this law that the just claims of all kindred tongues will be met and, yet, the precedence be given to the native speech. Mr. Marsh's estimate of his diction in the Essay on Bacon, as seventy-five percent as to its English, is below rather than above the truth and will fairly express the average percentage of English throughout his works. His papers are full of Saxon monosyllables and dissyllables. As a rule, he seeks the shorter terms and phrases. While not as fully Saxon as Bunyan and Defoe, he is a long way in advance of Bacon, Hooker, Milton, Johnson, and is, in this respect a sufficiently ^{high} standard for the English student. His clearness was largely the result of pure English.

(b) Copiousness of style

This quality might be stated in other terms as, Ease, Facility or Fluency. It is an expression of literary art which seems to have all the freedom of nature and gives to the reader the happy impression of the fullness of the author. The older English writers would call this style, fertile. It involves what is properly termed, the art of amplification or paraphrase. It is the fullest possible expression of an idea within the limits of rhetorical brevity. No writer previous to Macaulay so richly possessed this element. It is one of the latest and most difficult results of literary labor. Although found in Macaulay's earliest prose, its quality is much higher in his more mature writing. Copiousness in his Essay on Milton is one thing and in the best parts of the History, quite another. Natural gifts apart, it depends on a wide and choice area of reading; on a close study of words, native and foreign, and, above all, on a healthful literary taste to discern and appreciate whatsoever is good. These things make what Bacon calls - "the full man"; what older critics called in the best sense, a voluble man. The words roll out in a rich profusion. The style is copious. Nor is this

ease of expression confined to the diction of his narrations and descriptions, but enters into all the style. The thought itself flows smoothly and freely on. There are no bands or restrictions. Much of the attractiveness of the author's prose is found just here. The reader is not asked to plod through the pages as through ~~the~~ heavy style of Burton and Browne, pitying, at every turn, the crudeness and bondage of the author, but is carried by the author himself on the high tide of his thought and feeling. One often wonders at the ease with which he is transported from point to point. There is a charm in the verbal and mental fullness. The style is completely elaborated without being labored. It is not denied that danger lurks at the very door of this quality, in the tendency to verboseness - in a copiousness where ideas and words are in the inverse ratio. Macaulay has been sharply dealt with as to diffuseness of style. Common readers as well as the critics have noted it. No impartial judge of his prose can deny the justness of the accusation. "When he has to tell" says Morison "that the Reformation greatly diminished the wealth of the Church of England, it cost him two pages to say so".

Macaulay had his own reasons for much of this wordiness. It was partly unavoidable and partly intentional. His habit, from early life, of reading all that came to hand and of seeing what he saw in many different phases; his marvellous memory in holding what he had and reproducing it and his spacious wealth of diction, made it quite impossible for him to be satisfied with the one statement of an idea. He must present it and re-present it. On the other hand, his theory of style, especially as applied to narrative writing, made it necessary for him to be copious up to the verge of prolixity. He often passed that verge and did what Swift and Dickens did in fiction - incurred the charge of tedious redundancy. Despite this fault, however, Pope, had he been living, might have spoken of the copious Macaulay as he did of the "copious Dryden". There was a real richness of word and phrase - a latent store of resources always accessible at need. The style withal, is natural and original. It is the author's own. His digressions are too many and too long but, in time, he always returns to the main idea as Swift did and as Hooker did not. In the true sense of the term, his prose style is voluminous. The best that can be said of it at this point is, that this copiousness at times degenerated to diffuseness, but in the main, kept within the limits of literary law and added interest to the narrative. If he is "one of the best story-tellers" in Modern English, story-tellers must have some liberty. There is such a theory as Prose-License.

(c) Pictorial Skill

This is an essential feature of the Descriptive order

of prose. It might, without error be called - The Descriptive Style. Critics often refer to it as, the graphic or picturesque form of prose. It is closely allied to that literary clearness and copiousness of which we have spoken and, yet, is a feature distinct in itself. The French speak of it as, power of depicting or painting. It marks the border line between prose and poetry and is especially prominent in that exceptional kind of prose known as poetical. In this department of style, Macaulay has done notable work. It is difficult to state whether this feature is more prominent in the essays or in the history. It is visible in the style throughout and gives to it that imaginative tinge and vividness of coloring which the most cursory reader of Macaulay must have noticed. In giving us his definition of history this feature is emphasized. He writes - "History is a compound of poetry and philosophy." The special stress laid upon the poetic or pictorial element is seen as he explains the definition. "It impresses truths on the mind by a vivid representation of characters and incidents." As we shall see hereafter, whatever Macaulay intended to do in the way of combining the poetic and philosophic in historical prose and giving them equal place, he actually magnified the poetic at every point and made the narrative a real story in the sphere of the imaginative. Much of the prose reads as if it were in the realm of fiction. It represents in prose what historical plays represent in dramatic poetry.

Here, again, Macaulay exposed himself to the judgment of the critics and has been strongly condemned by many of them as guilty of excessive ornament in style. His prose is said to pass the limits of prose proper and enter the domain of the poetic. It is alleged, that as an essayist and historian he attempts the role of the novelist and subordinates the didactic element in narrative to the pictorial and attractive.

There is truth in all this. There is a sense in which the radical defect of Macaulay's style lies just here-in the love of excessive finish, in over abundant metaphor, in literary painting rather than in the logical elaboration of the idea for substantial ends. He seems to delight far too much in embellishment for its own sake and would artfully decoy the reader from idea to imagery. Hence the reader must be constantly awake to the detection and interpretation of the figurative element. Metaphors and Similes become ends in themselves. The description takes precedence as to interest of the scene or object described and fact succumbs to fiction. It is difficult at times to tell where we are, whether on firm ground or in mid air. Romance and reality are so blended that the result is, at times, confusing. All this conceded, however, much of the peculiar power of Macaulay's prose is in its pictorial feature in so far as it is healthfully exhibited. No impartial critic could afford to decry this.

There is a higher grade of delineative skill that marks the author as an historical artist. There is a boldness and definiteness of outline which at once attracts attention, awakens interest and represents the idea more clearly than could otherwise be done. It does with the thought what the old limners did with the typography of the book - sets it forth in such graphic portraiture that the reader may take the sketch as a verbal framework and fill in for himself the completed picture. Some of the authors most brilliant passages are of this picturesque order. After reading them they hang before the mind's eye with all the vividness of a great painting. This characteristic of style is signally present in the History and the historical essays, when the author is delineating some striking character or scene. When he has done, the lineaments are as clear as if they were sculptured in bas-relief and could be approached and touched. There is here an important province of literary art and it is safe to say that no writer of English Prose has excelled Macaulay in it. No one of his predecessors, John Bunyan apart, at all approximated him. De Quincey and the great English novelists - Scott, Dickens and Thackeray - had much of the same skill. Prescott and Motley ~~are~~ of our own country are his closest competitors in this field of historical art.

Critics, such as Leslie Stephens, have gone too far in a wide-sweeping denunciation of this feature of Macaulay's style. Morison, in his excellent biography assumes safer ground when he calls attention to this quality in some specimen passages and challenges the critics to decry it.

Descriptive Writing is one of the leading forms of prose and ever inviting more attention. There is such a thing as legitimate Word-Painting by which sameness of style is relieved and the meaning made more effective. Macaulay would have undoubtedly gained reputation and more permanent influence had he used imagery and ornament more sparingly. Still, great care is to be taken lest while this is conceded we lose sight of that exceptional descriptive skill which he possessed and which goes very far to explain the facts that his essays and history are still in demand among us.

(2) Excellence of Sentence Structure

Macaulay was the Lombard of his age - a master of sentences. What his biographer, Mr. Trevelyan, states, would seem to be confirmed, "that he never allowed a sentence to pass muster until it was as good as he could make it," until every sentence ran as smoothly as running water and every paragraph closed with a telling clause.

He believed, with De Quincey, that there was no more important matter in prose discourse than sentence building - the formation of the frame ~~and~~ of the thought. Very much of that devotion to detail, of which we read in his life, was spent in this direction until he at length formed the habit of shaping his words in the clearest and most cogent manner. All readers of Macaulay must have been impressed with his skill in mere structure, in what has been termed, the "mechanology" of style. There is a marked absence of those harsh and crude constructions that indicates the presence of the novice. The successive transitions from clause to clause are so carefully adjusted as to give all the effect of naturalness to the style. Artifice gives place to a genuine literary art. So distinctive is this element in the author's style that a good manual of sentence-structure might be compiled from the pages of his prose. All writers upon the art of discourse must make frequent reference to Macaulay.

There are two types of sentence which are especially frequent not so much because they ~~were~~ favorites with the author as that they are in themselves the best rhetorical forms.

(a) The Periodic Sentence

In this, as is known, the clauses are arranged rhetorically rather than grammatically. The object is not so much to arrange subject, predicate and adjuncts as a matter of syntax as it is to present the parts of the sentence in the order of their relative importance. The thought determines the form. The result is that of the logical climax. In the frequency, correctness and force of this progressive structure, Macaulay's prose is a model. So apt is he in its use, that almost any page of his writing may be taken at random for purposes of example. Gross violations of propriety are almost unknown in his prose while even where the Loose Sentence is used, it is so terse and skilfully combined as to give to the leading thought the prominence it deserves. Though, as in most writers, where the periodic sentence prevails, the shorter form is preferred, special attention is to be called to the excellence and comparative frequency in Macaulay of the longer structure. In no English prose of equal amount can there be found so many correctly formed Periodic Paragraphs or Periods. Some of them are of such length and import as to manifest consummate skill in their construction. A series of such paragraphs is often found in which the double and difficult result is reached of maintaining the unity of each separate paragraph and the common unity of all.

It is just here that the oratorical feature of the author's prose comes into prominence and finds its explanation. Literary historians have noted this quality. "Macaulay's natural aptitude" says Morison "was oratorical rather than literary." Nor is the reference here exclusively to his special power in parliamentary address when he came face to face with an English audience as

a defender of the Reform Bill. His brilliant success here is well known and the eulogiums of Peel and Gladstone are a matter of history. His speeches in the House of Commons, it is to be noted, are a substantial part of his prose work and cannot be left out of the account in determining his rank as a writer. We refer here, however, to his distinctively literary prose as possessed of much of this oratorical force and this, as the result of skillful periodic structure. The parts of the paragraph are adjusted with reference to their best effect. As we peruse the periods, the result is impressive as well as enlightening. The reader is often aroused to a high degree of ardor and feels the hand of a master. Hence it is, that many parts of Macaulay's history read as an oration reads, while his essays abound in passages which in their emotive vigor remind one of the best selections from Burke and Pitt. There is no marked degree of oratorical grace but the presence of true English stamina is there and it is telling. Most of this effect is due, of course, to the inherent force of the subject matter. Much of it is, also, due to what has been well termed "the luminous order and logical sequence of the parts" of the structure. It is impossible to understand what is meant by a recent critic in calling Macaulay "clumsy" in sentence structure. His bitterest opposers have conceded to him this form of skill as a writer.

(b) The Balanced Sentence.

This species of sentence is equally frequent and characteristic. Though not so prominent as in the Essays of Bacon, it is sufficiently so to call for special notice. The reader advances but a short way ere he discovers this antithetical bias. It is in this part of the author's work that there is seen the reason of much of his literary power as an historian. This is especially so in that work of delineation which has been mentioned.

It often occurs that this graphic portraiture of men behind the facts of history can best be set forth by the use of sharp contrast rather than by progressive statement. History and Prose Fiction have this element in common and are thus together related to descriptive discourse. What is known by the dramatist as, the power of characterization, is here needed and illustrated. Macaulay's prose is marked by this. He was fond of studying men and things by their opposites. An idea no sooner presented itself to him than he saw all the possible ideas with which it might be contrasted. He explained the positive and negative by each other. In the province of logic, it is the argument from contraries. This use of antithesis gives point and pungency to the style; lends to it a degree of interest which wins attention and succeeds where other forms would fall. His contrasts between Dante and Milton; between the Puritan and other religious orders; between Hastings and other culprits; between Frederic the Great and other rulers and between his own times and those preceding - all mark him as a master of this type of sentence. He had a keen eye to the differences of things.

Some of the examples of antithesis will be of interest to the

student and general reader.

"The poetry of Milton differs from that of Dante as the hieroglyphics of Egypt differed from the picture writing of Mexico. The images which Dante employs speak for themselves. Those of Milton have a signification which is often discernible to the initiated only."

"Logicians may reason about abstractions but the great mass of men must have images."

"The character of Milton was peculiarly distinguished by loftiness of spirit; that of Dante, by intensity of feeling."

Of Charles I., he says -

"We charge him with having broken his coronation oath, and we are told that he kept his marriage vow. We censure him for having violated the articles of The Petition of Right and we are informed that he was accustomed to hear prayers at six in the morning."

"The Puritan was made up of two different men; the one, all self-abasement, penitence, gratitude, passion; the other, proud, calm, inflexible, sagacious. He prostrated himself in the dust before his Maker but he set his feet on the neck of his king."

Such are some of these numerous examples of contrasted structure. Clause is set over against clause with all the mechanism of architectural law and ideas are made to face and explain each other.

It is suggestive to note, in this connection, that much of Macaulay's power as a prose satirist finds its interpretation here. This form of sentence is related to satire somewhat as the periodic is to oratory. The plain straightforward structure is not crisp and terse enough for the purposes of irony. It is, moreover, too honest to give expression to any double meaning or in any way to conceal the truth. In poetry and prose alike, all successful satirists have dealt largely in counter statement. Butler in *Hudibras*; Pope in the *Dunciad*; Dryden in his *Epistles*; Swift in his allegories and Addison, in his papers, have all freely used it. Macaulay knew his forte. He saw, at once, that his age demanded satirical prose as Dryden's did (poetry) satirical. As Plutarch saw fit to describe his characters by parallels, Macaulay chose antithesis and succeeded. The historic scenes and personages that he has thus portrayed form a part of the common literary stock of every age.

At this point, once again, the critics are awake and in arms.

Macaulay's prose is said to carry antithesis too far. The balanced structure overreached itself. Form, it is argued, takes precedence of subject matter in that truth and good taste are alike sacrificed to complete the verbal contrast. Mechanology is again the vice.

Not a little of the author's prose is clearly open to this accusation, especially so, where the contrasts are multiplied at great lengths so that the thought returns upon itself. There are

times when the natural order would seem to be anything but epigrammatic and, yet, the author insists on presenting the idea in this form. Beginning a paragraph with a contrasted sentence, this form is maintained throughout as if from sheer fancy or artifice. His notable lack of genuine humor, as seen in Lamb and Addison, is largely attributable to the fact that the satirical element enters into all his pleasantry. Still criticism has been unduly severe at this point. In aiming to account for that degree of literary currency which the writings of Macaulay have had in enlightened circles, it would be difficult to assign the leading place to any one quality of prose style. This epigrammatic brevity, however, must be admitted as a factor here, nor is it unworthy of notice that such a structure is all the more a mark of skill in that it reveals insight and discrimination. Literary antithesis when of the true order marks anything but superficiality. It marks the presence of ideas as the basis of contrast.

Every critical reader of Macaulay's prose wishes there had been somewhat less of this type of sentence. As it is, however, it is thoroughly in keeping with the author's theory of style, with the peculiar quality of his mental power and his personal characteristics.

In other hands, it would have been more abused and can never be safely imitated by the aspiring writer as a cardinal excellence of style.

The Balanced Structure, properly viewed, is exceptional and not regular. Its purpose is to secure variety and occasional point and not to furnish the staple form of sentence.

Macaulay's prose without the epigrammatic element would be another and inferior order of prose. Hence, it follows that antithesis is a good thing in its place, but has its limits. Organism is better than Mechanism. The study of Carlyle will reopen this discussion as to antithesis.

(3) Literary Personality

By this is meant not so much that the style is original as that it is individual. It has a character and tone peculiar to itself by which it may easily be distinguished from that of preceding and contemporary writers. His style was his own to that degree that it carries with it its own interpretation and credentials. The discerning literary age is never at a loss to detect it, whatever its surroundings may be. Hence, it is, that Macaulay did what but few authors of English may be said to have done. He founded and transmitted an English prose style of his own for the introduction of which he was as much responsible as is the inventor for his new patent. Whatever it was in other particulars, it was novel to the eye. It was Macaulayan. In this respect he did what Bacon, Milton, Addison and Johnson did in their respective epochs. He wrote in his own way and did it so effectually as to establish a kind of standard and to gather followers. By this individual method in literary art, he raised himself immeasurably above the great majority of his contemporaries, while the large number of his imitators in England and America testifies to the importance of his

work.

A remarkable fact as to the personality of Macaulay's style is, that it was so developed and maintained in the face of strong temptations to surrender it. It is known from the statements of his biographers that he was as conversant with preceding and current literature as was any man of his age. He was conversant with all the existent forms of expression many of which had been accepted as models by the best critical opinion of the time. Though his style is antithetical as Bacon's was it is in no sense Baconian. Though it is clear and copious as was that of Swift and Addison, it is in no sense Augustan.

He used the forms of sentence which Milton and Johnson used, though in a different way, while satire with him was quite a different thing from satire in the essays of Lamb. If, as we are told, the style is the man, then the personality of Macaulay's writings must be assigned a high rank. A question of interest arises here as to the degree in which individuality of style is a test and mark of personal ability. It is a question specially difficult to decide in the case of Macaulay. Reasoning abstractly it must be granted that inventiveness of means and methods, other things being equal, indicates inherent grasp and power. Historically however, these forms of power are found to be in many cases quite dissevered. Mr. Morison, in his recent biography, decides this question against the author while admitting the truth of the principle in theory. "Real novelty of style," he says, "is generally a safe test of originality of mind and character. With Macaulay the test does not extend so far." This we believe to be the safer position. As we shall see, hereafter, Macaulay's theory of style was such that he could easily separate form from substance. With him, therefore, originality of style meant simply - newness of method. It did not necessarily involve or indicate with him high creative genius in the sphere of prose. His style is original in prose as that of Pope's was in poetry, not original as that of Milton, Burns and Wordsworth was. On this plane, however, of individuality of method, he had no superior. Despite the high examples already existing in the persons of his predecessors, his own modus was revolutionary in English Prose. It was neither Elizabethan or Augustan, but Georgian Prose. It was, in fact, the inauguration of Modern Prose as it dates from the opening of the nineteenth century and as illustrated in the writings of De Quincey and succeeding authors. There was something about it that attracted attention merely as to the novelty of its form. The essay and the history had never been written just so before or in a manner quite so engaging. Whatever it was as a style it challenged the examination of all those who were watching the historical development of English Prose. There was a freshness about it indicative of newness. Swift and Addison were animated in style but here was an order of prose possessed of still more life and range. It looked forward along the century for its inspiration

rather than to the times of the Tudors. It was a prose fully in keeping with the age that produced it and to that degree marks its author as an interpreter of his time. The notable line of English novelists and essayists that followed owed something, at least, of their literary success to the impulses that were then at work. Charles Lamb and the later British Orators largely contributed to this fresher impulse in Prose.

Mere personality in literary art is no mark of excellence. It may belong to authors of second and third-rate excellence. Robert Burton and Sir Thomas Browne were such authors - original in style and in no sense models of prose. In fact, such personality, often, takes the form of literary eccentricity and is in the inverse ratio of literary power. Real individuality of style as in Bacon and Burke must be but one among many qualities of excellence, developing with them and developed by them. In this sense Carlyle and Emerson had styles of their own, and in this sense, personality is a mark of merit. At this point Macaulay is open to just criticism.

THE CHIEF DEFECTS OF MACAULAY'S PROSE.

(1) Want of Intellectual Depth and Vigor.

It may be said with safety that the trend of all later criticism of our author's style is in this direction. Critics are well nigh agreed that the true test here must be at the intellectual point and that the test exposes radical defect. In confirmation of this view, some particulars may be noted.

(a) Macaulay's Theory of Style was Superficial

We have alluded to the philosophic distinction that De Quincey makes in his *Essay on Style*, between Mechanology and Organology. By the first is meant, that the main element in style is grammatical structure; that style is purely an external thing subject to rigid rule and that the main object of literary expression is artistic form in order to gratify the aesthetic taste of the reader. On this basis, the French theory as to the virtue of embellishment as an end in itself is correct and the chief aim of the writer is figurative finish.

By Organology is meant, that matter controls form; that the writer's main purpose is to express his thought and himself: that language is a medium only and not an end; that external adornment is good in its place but incidental; that the grammatical is secondary to the rhetorical and literary, in a word, that Discourse is the expression of intellectual life. It is organic.

Of these two methods, Macaulay's prose illustrates mainly the first - the constructive theory of style instead of the vital and natural. Whatever the author's pretensions were, this was his uniform literary practice. Hence, his essays and history, as stated are so often unduly pictorial. Copiousness runs into redundancy; antithesis, into mechanism; prose into poetry and we are often at a loss to separate the writer from the mere artist. That all true



style is based on thought and governed by it, and is worthless as a theory in and for itself, Macaulay seemed to have ignored. The great thing was the form. Even historical facts themselves were made to yield to this ruling passion for artistic presentation. He was determined as in Bacon and other essays to be readable whether he was reliable or not. So dominant is this theory that it finally leads to moral perversion. No one thoroughly conversant with Macaulay's method can fail to note this servitude to the aesthetic theory of style. Words for words' sake - Structure for structure's sake.- An epigram at all hazards. Art as mere art,- this is the ideal. Style, he would tell us, is the art of verbal execution. All this, it will be noted, is strictly unintellectual in the sphere of discourse, and here the method must be sharply condemned. Nothing could be more foreign to the true theory of style, as the expression of thought, than this unsubstantial theory and it has done untold evil. Mention has been made of the author's popularity in his own and subsequent times and of the large number of those who are pleased to shape their literary methods on his. This is all true. It is not to be forgotten, however, that on a different theory of style, he would have had a far more excellent constituency and would have been a far greater aid to the ambitious writer. Few things are more unfortunate in a literary point of view than that this writer's theory of style which dissevers idea from form has received such sanction from such high authority. Macaulay has great merits as a writer. These have been stated. He filled a most important place and did a worthy work but it is ever to be urged that his view of style was, after all, the lower and not the higher one, based on taste rather than intellect and requiring for its illustration nothing of the great qualities of mind. It was fortunate that he was not writing in the days of Bacon, when English was in shaping for permanent use and especially fortunate that even as he wrote such men as De Quincey were also writing and strenuously insisting that the first thing in literary style is the mental life beneath it.

(b) His Cast of mind as an author was aesthetic rather than logical.

The more closely we examine the inner nature of the author's mind, the more clearly it will appear that Macaulay, as a writer, or a man, cannot be ranked among the intellectual powers of England as Hooker, Bacon, Milton and Burke can be. He had little of that intellectual grasp and reach which marked such men. He is inferior here even to Addison and far inferior to the strong-minded Johnson.

There are many facts in Macaulay's literary life indicative of this.

As to the particular kind of reading to which he was most addicted, we know that it was fiction and poetry and the elegant literature of Europe, rather than that order of reading to which Bacon refers as he says "Studies serve for ability". His contempt of all forms of truth that might be called philosophical or abstract, is well known. He spoke in more than offensive terms of the sages of Greece and simply pitied the man who could seem to find in their pages any kind of profit or pleasure.

His essay on Bacon is an indignant protest against the utility of all higher study and are he is done he denounces all the philosophers as worse than useless. He speaks of metaphysics as Hamilton does of mathematics and with as little sense. Macaulay's criticisms here were harmless in that they were based on prejudice and total ignorance.

His order of mind was not sufficiently speculative to lead him to enquire into the philosophy of any theory. He preferred history and even there, the romantic phase of it. He had no idea of the philosophy of history. Few things are more notable in Macaulay's best prose than the absence of generalization. He knew little of logic and cared less for it. The idea of pursuing an argument dispassionately through the gradation of proof to the end rarely entered his mind. He preferred the euthymeme to the full syllogism and often concealed therein his specious reasoning. He discussed men and measures but not germinal principles. He followed processes and methods regardless of the laws on which they are based. The History of England, in so far as method is concerned, is narrative and descriptive. As Pope would express it - "it never deviates" into the philosophical. Causes and effects stand by themselves. So, in the historical essays as in those that are controversial, there is the same lack of breadth of brow while as a critic he is hereby made an unsafe leader. All this is in the line of intellectual weakness, and as we read we long for the Baconian order of style.

In fine, Macaulay was an accomplished literary designer. His originality was confined to ways and means. He combined the novelist, poet, journalist and general prose writer in one personality. As a union of forms this has value and marks some inventive power. Had he added, however, some qualities eminently intellectual, his influence would have been more than doubled.

(2.) Want of Ethical Earnestness and Aim.

It cannot be denied that the prose of Macaulay is, to a good degree, emotive and animated. The criticism which questions this is astray from fact. The point is, as to the source and quality of this feeling. Here, we must answer that it is purely literary rather than moral. It is taste and taste only that controls. The impassioned element is not born out of the inner recesses of the soul as the home of the ethical instincts. Biographers tell us of the weakness of his devotion to the truth; of his lack of the "stronger passion" and of the comparative looseness of his view of life. Those who have read Macaulay for years and not discovered this have been desultory readers. Such will be surprised to note throughout an almost studied evasion of what Wordsworth calls "high-thinking" - an indifferent acceptance of the world as it is without any special anxious concern as to its probable future.

We read Macaulay's prose for certain ends and we secure them - narrative and descriptive skill, correctness of structure, copiousness of diction and general artistic excellence. If we look for

the presence of a governing moral purpose as a writer, he fail to find it. What we may call the literary conscience as it existed in Milton and Addison is an undeveloped faculty. He writes on Byron and Bunyan with equal ease and is satisfied with the result quite apart from any searching analysis of character. His indignation at Hastings is political more than moral. His references to Roman Catholicism and to the English Reformation are alike in verbal taste while he utterly fails in the discussion of such a subject as Milton or Hampden or the great Puritan order to grasp the sublime moral issues at stake in those times or the heroic character of the men behind them. Macaulay was moral in character and in literary style. He never offended in this regard as Swift and Smollett have done. His pages are as clean as those of any English author. He is open to criticism however, in that this ethical quality finds no pervasive or definite expression in his prose. At this point it is negative and unsatisfactory. As Morison phrases, he has nothing for us "when our light is low". No prominent writer of English Prose has been so free from any offense against moral taste and yet so devoid of a decided moral impulse and purpose. The reader is scarcely the better or the worse ethically, from the perusal of his papers. He leaves us on moral questions just where he found us. He does not openly and enthusiastically defend any great religious principle for the sake of the principle itself or denounce any great evil because it is an evil. Such matters he delegates to those whose official business makes it their duty. His work is literary and that only. His prose gives no evidence of that Miltonic spirit which led the great Puritan to do all his literary work with an ethical aim as "ever in his great Task-Master's eye".

PRESENT AND PROSPECTIVE RANK OF HIS PROSE STYLE

It is a remark common among English critics of the present day, that Macaulay's influence in the world of prose letters is on the wane and will, in the near future, quite disappear. It is argued that his fame hitherto has been out of all proportion to his merits and that a more intelligent estimate of literary prose will assign him to his proper place of inferiority.

Such views as these are current enough to demand attention. Extreme as they are in the form of their statement, there is an element of sober truth in them as in similar views relative to the probable future of Dickens and Eliot in prose fiction.

We have called attention to the main merits of his style. As far as they go, they are merits on the basis of which much of Macaulay's past and present renown is built. More than this, some of them are such fundamental qualities of style and withal so comparatively rare, that the presence of them must insure a good degree of literary prominence. No style, for example, can exhibit narrative and descriptive excellence as Macaulay's does and be said to be inferior or doomed to speedy disappearance. His prose as it reads today is representative English Prose, though not necessarily in all respects a model form. It has enough excellences to give it commanding place and to insure it against extinction.

On the other hand, the two cardinal defects to which we have alluded are so serious in their nature as to make the exact place of the author's prose in English Letters an open question. Even as an expression of true literary art, its want of intellectual depth would preclude its occupying the first rank as does that of De Quincey, while the absence of the ethical element in spirit and purpose would rank it below the prose of Addison. The best that can be said for it is that by reason of its manifest defects it cannot be placed first, and by reason of its manifest merits it must be placed among those specimens of English which we call representative or leading.

He was in every sense what the French mean by the *litterateur* - a man of letters for letters' sake - a lover of literary art. As such, he will always be read and especially by those in early manhood and womanhood. Probably no English writer is today so influential in molding the prose style of academic students as is Macaulay. His prose lies so on the borderland between prose and verse as to escape the dullness of the one and the meaningless fancy of the other. It is sufficiently solid and serious while not prosaic and sufficiently attractive and figurative while not romantic.

Such an order of poetic prose will command large numbers of readers and shape their style. The readable will be read despite all theory and defect. This being so, it is well that the author's prose is as good as it is. With all its faults it has high merit. It is clear, copious, facile and finished. It has delighted thousands of readers and fascinated not a few, and while devoid of Baconian strength is marked by some of the best qualities of standard English style.

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